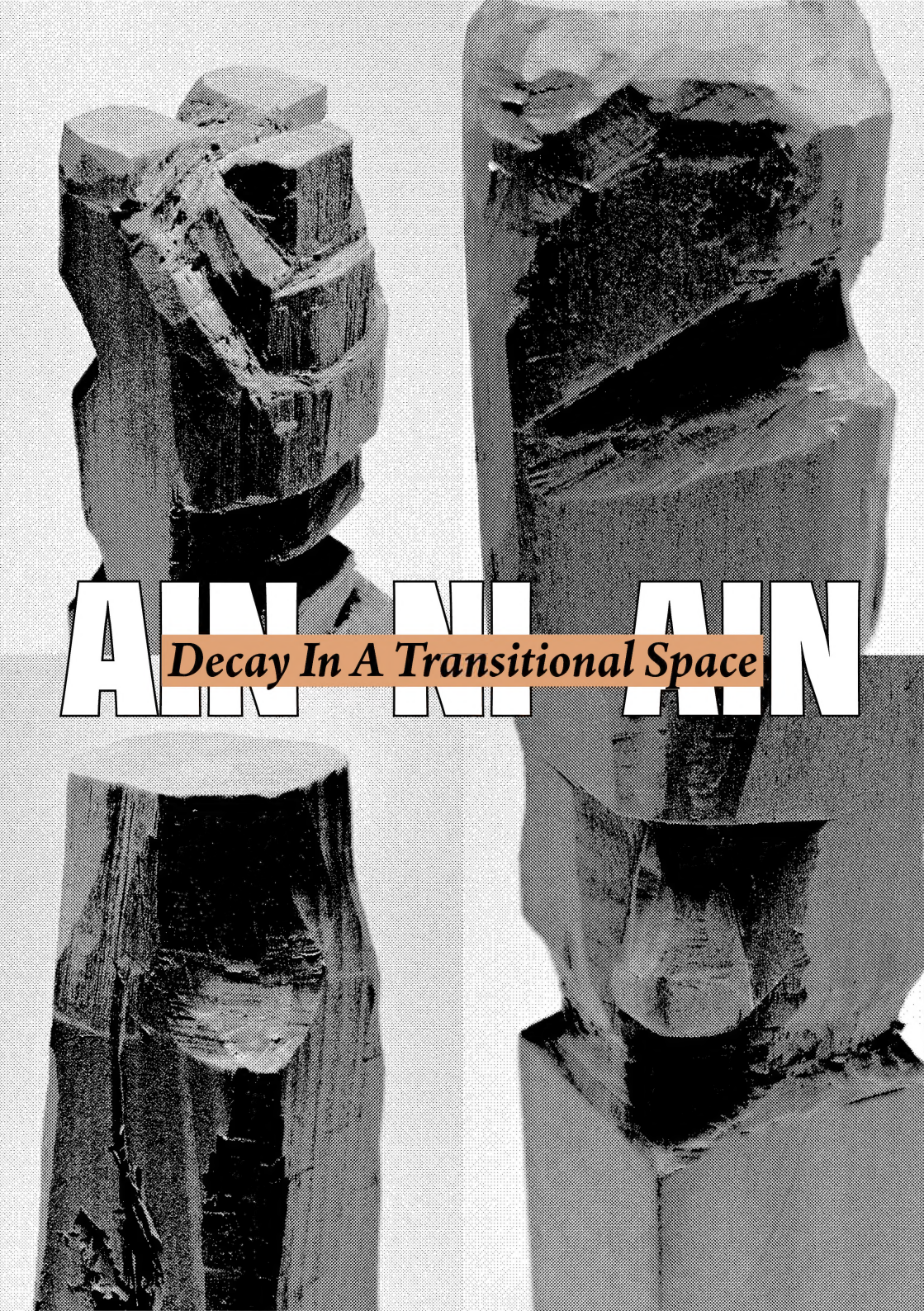
AIN NI AIN
Decay In A Transitional Space

Source:

Definition from Oma Nellie · *2nd gen*

‘Ain Ni Ain’

/Ain Ni Ain/

Expression (Maluku Malay)

1. An expression used to convey interconnectedness. Within family as well as communities.

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P r o j e c t

'Ain Ni Ain' is a deeply personal and cultural intervention by Aaron Epping that reimagines the traditional yene ancestor sculptures from the Moluccan Islands ([redacted]).

*Rooted in the spiritual and material traditions of his Moluccan heritage, the project explores how these ancestral forms can be reinterpreted today, **not just as cultural symbols, but as vessels for connection and care.***

The project did not arise alone from his desire to explore cultural heritage, but from a growing urgency to repair what felt broken:

*the ties between himself and those he comes from. **Aaron reached out to several family members, using the act of making as a form of dialogue where words may have failed.***

T e x t

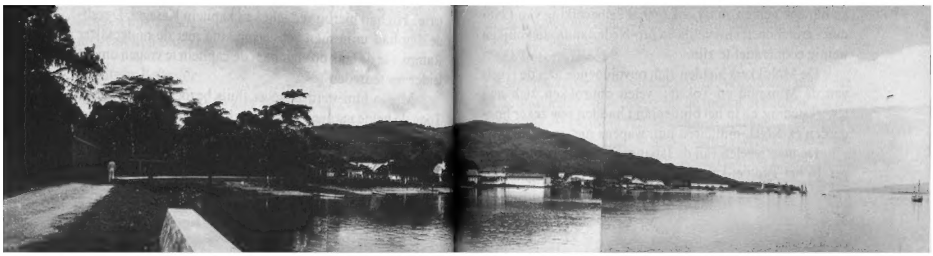
Positioned between personal ritual and critical design, 'Ai Ni Ain' reflects on how familial bonds, though cracked or strained, can still be reclaimed through care, listening, and the intimacy of making.

Installation:

A table with all 4 statues, a table cloth that goes down to the floor and ends up at 2 pillars, both pillars have flash cards with highlights from the conversations we had. One pillar references Aaron's side, 2 highlights. The other, 8 highlights from the conversation. On the back of the flashcard is a close up picture of the part that person had worked on.

[redacted]

it's been time to reconnect for years already, I haven't visisted my [redacted], I haven't had a genuine conversation [redacted] I can remember, I haven't been able to express the gratitude I feel [redacted] yet. ***For this project, I hope to be able to intervene in the decay of [redacted] Something that already feels long overdue.***



R e s e a r c h

'Ain Ni Ain' started out as a research project on the Moluccan community in Helmond and how they fight against the decay of the culture after almost 5 generations after immigration.

The Moluccan community in Helmond does a lot of work to preserve culture in the area. We have faught back against attempts from the government to 'forget'.

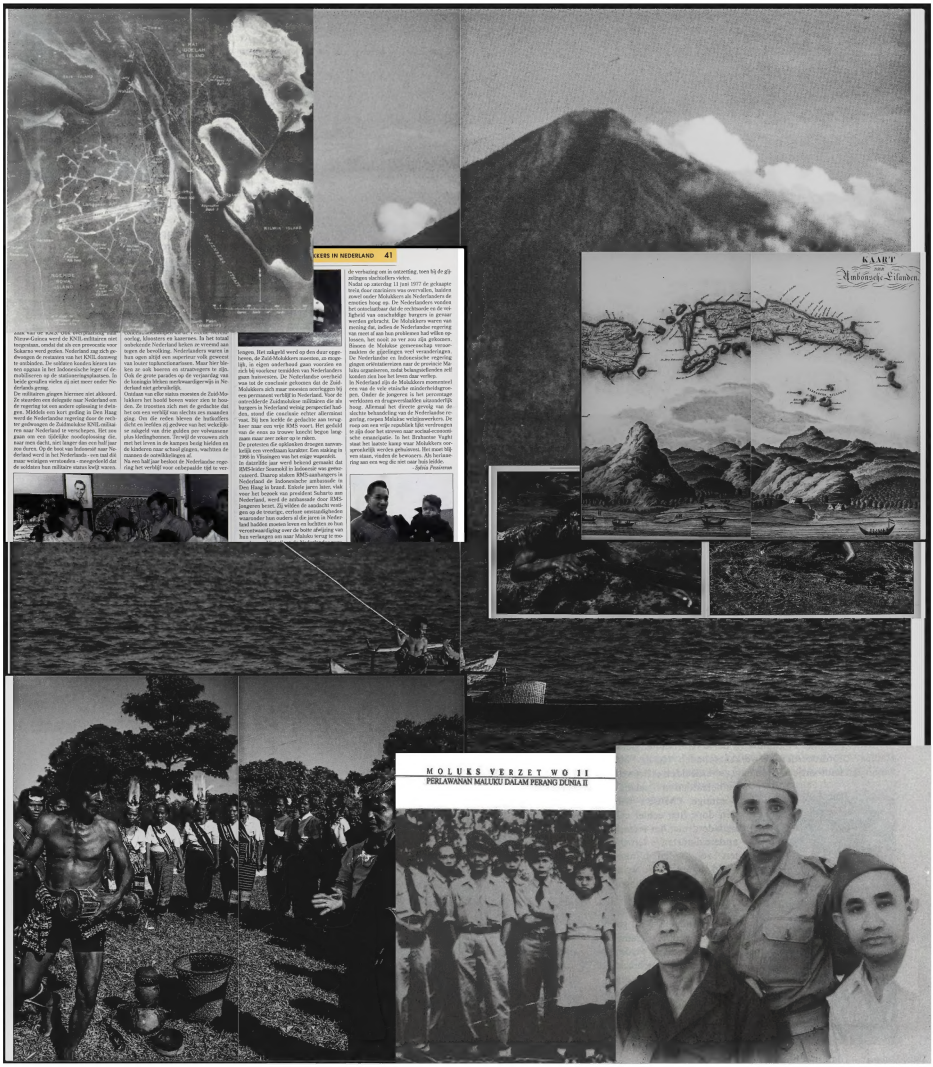
We organise Moluccan markets, Moluccan informational days, Moluccan parties. We have a 3rd generation Moluccan man running and leading for 'youth mayor' of Helmond.

There are multiple foundations founded specifically for the purpose of perserving Moluccan culture.

One of them also named: 'Ain Ni Ain'

After my initial research on the efforts made I also researched the history of the Maluku islands in general and also looked into how the first generation got to the Netherlands.

P r o c e s s


KAART
van de
Ambonsche Eilanden
MOLUKS VERZET WO II
PERLAWANAN MALUKU DALAM PERANG DUNIA II

R e s e a r c h

I noticed that my research didn't necessarily start from a desire to 'help' or 'better' the communities efforts in perserving the culture.

My research was based on my own desire to feel more connected to my roots.

I noticed that my own connection to my Moluccan roots and my family had faded over the years.

Whether it's due to a lack of time, a lack of communication skills, a lack of motivation.

I hadn't spoken to my family in forever. Not only my Moluccan family, but all of my family.

Without pointing any fingers, there has [redacted]

Which made it so I haven't had the desire to interact with a lot of my family members, eventhough I know they love me, I know they care.

And eventhough I still live at home, [redacted]

P r o c e s s

During my research I stumbled upon a ritualistic pratice in the Maluku islands called 'Yene'.

This name is not used in every Moluccan island but due to colonisation, the distruction of historical artifacts and the influence of missionaries fading oral history this is the only definitive term we have for this practice at the moment.

In this spiritual practice, small sculptures are carved for the sole purpose of housing the spirits of our ancestors.

These sculptures are thereby also said to hold a lot of power.

Stories have been told of people stealing and selling these sculptures on the market or destroying the figure without paying respect to the spirit inside. In almost all of these stories, the people wronging the sculpture ends up dying of a strange desease.

Research Process

A Yene figure is made with the intention of housing a spirit as a temporary vessel or access point. A place where the spirit can dwell and be communicated with.

They are made with the intention in mind, spoken out loud before and after the carving is done. This could either be the entire intention spoken out loud, or just the name of the spirit you want to house.

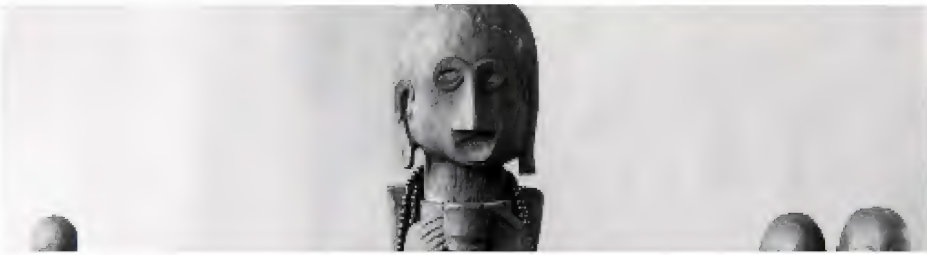
They are carved with intention, the form of the figure is dependent on the spirit as well. There is often a designated 'carver' in the family who makes the sculptures. This is a life-long role.

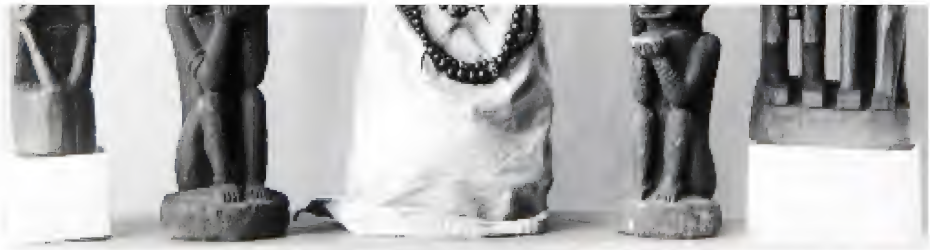
The sculptures are most often placed in the attics of family homes, designated sacred areas, well kept by members of the family. This area is also used for offerings such as wine, tabacco, etc.

The spirit inside of the figure might eventually move on to the spirit world again, but the figure will always remain as a gateway between, a point of communication between worlds.

Yene figures might be adorned with clothes, paint of symbols to symbolize status, gender, or role. (Earrings for women, feathered headpieces for warriors)

In the case that a human spirit is succesfully housed inside of the figure, prayers or chants are spoken, often asking for protection, blessings, guidance, etc.





P r o j e c t

[redacted]

For this project, I hope to be able to intervene in the decay of familial bonds. Something that already feels long overdue.

With this project I want to intervene the decay of familial bonds. I want to invite my family members to conversate while crafting 'Yene' inspired sculptures.

These sculptures will not house the spirit of our ancestors.

With this sculpture I want to house the spirit of the conversation. The spirit of our joined effort to create a new beginning.

P r o c e s s

The Ritual:

I will reinterpret the rituals used to make Yene figures in a way that houses the spirit of the conversation held between me and my family members.

P r o j e c t

Example of a prayer that's said before the carving on the islands:
(Translated to English)

'Oh spirit of the one who came before me,
Ancestor whose name I carry in silence,
Hear me now as I raise this wood from the earth.
With care I shape what was once tree, now memory.
May this body be worthy of your breath.
If you are near, let your presence guide my hand.
If you are far, may my calling reach you.
Let no harm pass through this act. Let no truth be hidden.
I carve with love. I carve with longing. I carve to remember.'

Example of a prayer that's said after the carving on the islands:
(Translated to English)

Ancestor, I have made this vessel in your name.
It is cracked so that you may breathe.
I offer food, voice, and silence to welcome you.
If you choose to dwell here, be gentle with us.
If you choose to only pass through, may you leave peace behind.
This is a place for you to rest, to witness, to bless.
What I could not say with words, I now say with wood.
I honor you. I remember you. I ask you to remain near.

P r o c e s s

Our prayer written to meditate on before the carving:
(Translated to English)

This is not just wood.
This is where we spend time together.
We come to this block with ***open hands and minds.***
Every mark we make is part of a moment shared.
Every pause in the carving is a chance to listen, to laugh, to be here.

Let this sculpture ***hold the spirit of the conversation,***
the small things that matter most.
Let it carry the warmth of being together.

We carve to make space for each other.
To notice what's been there all along.
To shape something new from something solid.

May this piece remember the sound of us,
Let it stand as a vessel that houses the spirit of our shared effort and communication.

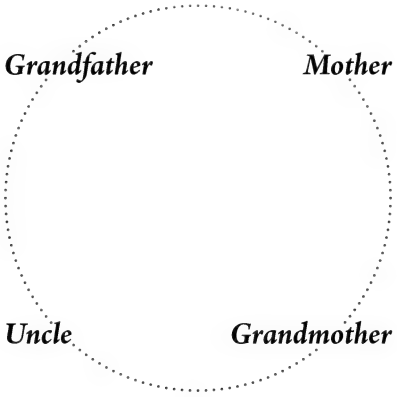
P r o j e c t

*For the carving tools I bought 3 tools from a shop on the '**Moluccan street**' in Amsterdam.*
(This has no special value to the carving process spiritually)

I bought a simple wood type, easy to carve, easy to work with.
20 blocks of wood.

Who do I invite?

I will be inviting the people [redacted]



P r o c e s s

Ritual Process Outline:

Before starting the carving and conversation,
I will ask if it's okay to record the conversation,

Before starting the carving we will read the prayer text,
close our eyes and repeat the text in our heads.

A conversation will follow and during the conversation we will both carve the same piece of wood, passing it over when we feel like it.

The carving of the wood will be determined by the conversation, determined by our emotions, we will carve whatever feels right.

After the conversation I will ask once again if it's okay to use the recording / contents of the conversation.

If it's possible I would like to stay a little longer and continue our conversation while the sculpture is still there.
(Marinating)

After the conversation is done, supplies and wood chips are cleaned, I will personally say the text once again and personally thank the sculpture and the spirit it houses for the process and clarity I have gained during the conversation.

Conversations

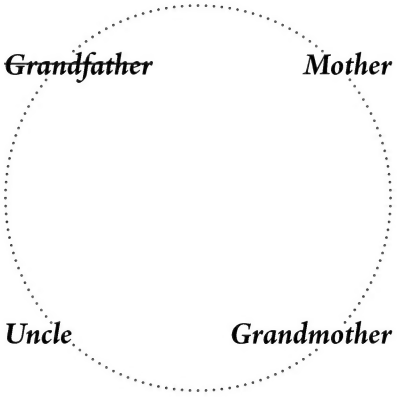
Grandfather

The conversation with my grandfather was quite lighthearted. We mostly talked about his life and his past, I tried to bring up more emotional topics during the conversation but noticed that he tried to shift the subject quickly in most cases.

He agreed to me recording and using the conversation but mentioned that if it was possible he would be more comfortable with me using the content of the conversation but not the actual recording.

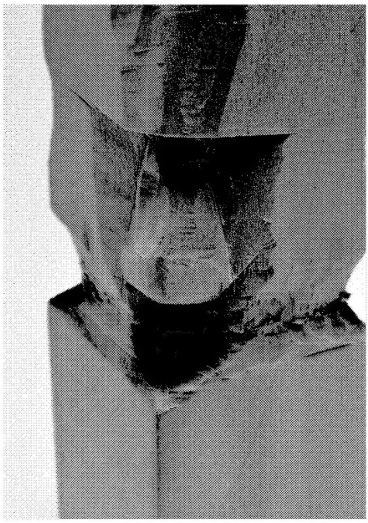
We were able to express our gratitude towards eachother and for the first time ever he opened up about his past to me.

I am happy with this conversation and the ritual went according to the outline.



S c u l p t u r e

G r a n d f a t h e r



During the carving it was quite clear that my grandfather mostly opted for 'perfection'.

Something that looked like something.

I would have liked to be able to talk more about his personal story, his emotions throughout his life since he went through a lot groing up.

I am grateful for this experience, And they welcomed me back if I ever want to talk again.

Conversations

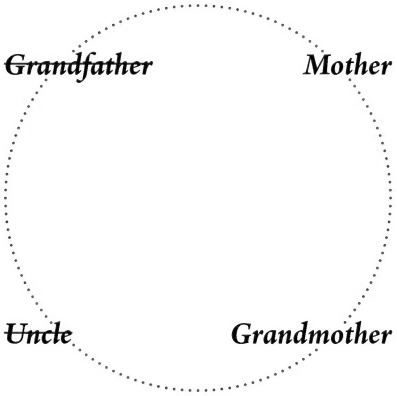
Uncle

The conversation with my uncle was a very interesting one. The conversation mostly revolved around how he viewed life, going through life. There was a heated moment, something I said triggered him and in response he raised his voice, this made me very silent. [redacted] *After that the conversation turned more smooth and open again.*

He agreed to me recording and using the conversation.

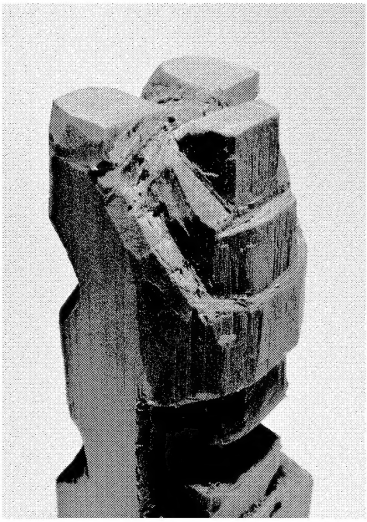
We were able to open up and confide in each other about what we are currently dealing with. This was the first time I was able to genuinely open myself up emotionally to someone in the family.

I am happy with this conversation. He was not able to doi the prayer beforehand but I still managed.



S c u l p t u r e

U n c l e



Before the 'trigger-moment' we both carved quite chaotically, afterwards, the sculpture turned into something much more organised.

Shapes in shapes.

This conversation ritual brought me a lot of clarity on his ways of life, things I never understood became understandable.

I am grateful for this experience, I will revisit in the future to discuss possible collaborative projects.